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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TAIPEI 003891

SIPDIS

STATE PASS AIT/W, INR/EAP. EAP/PD

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SUBJECT: THE 2006 KAOHSIUNG MAYORAL RACE -- LOCAL  
SPECULATION ON CANDIDATES

REF: TAIPEI 3793

Classified By: AIT Acting Director David Keegan, Reason(s): 1.4 (B/D).

1. (C) SUMMARY. THE SEPTEMBER 15TH ARRIVAL OF KAOHSIUNG'S NEW ACTING MAYOR YEH CHU-LAN, SENIOR PRESIDENTIAL ADVISOR AND FORMER VICE-PREMIER, HAS FUELED LOCAL SPECULATION ON THE 2006 KAOHSIUNG MAYORAL RACE. LOCAL KAOHSIUNG POLITICIANS REACTED TO YEH'S APPOINTMENT WITH EVERYTHING FROM SURPRISE TO OUTRAGE TO INDIFFERENCE TO SUPPORT. END SUMMARY.

2. (C) YEH CHU-LAN ARRIVED IN KAOHSIUNG ON THE MORNING OF SEPTEMBER 15, 2005, ACCOMPANIED BY HER GOOD FRIEND LY MEMBER GUAN BI-LING (DPP). IN A MEETING THE SAME DAY WITH AIT/K AND AIT/T, GUAN SAID YEH'S APPOINTMENT WAS MADE BY PRESIDENT CHEN FOLLOWING A COMPROMISE WITH DPP FACTIONS. GUAN BELIEVES YEH IS RIGHT FOR THE JOB BECAUSE SHE IS A SOPHISTICATED POLITICIAN AND FLEXIBLE ENOUGH FOR THE PEOPLE TO ACCEPT HER. GUAN HAD SPENT THE MORNING BEFORE HER MEETING WITH AIT INTRODUCING YEH AROUND TOWN TO IMPORTANT CONTACTS. HOWEVER, GUAN NOTED, THE CITY COUNCIL'S VICE SPEAKER, TSAI SUNG-HSIUNG, A KMT SUPPORTER, HAD SLAMMED THE DOOR IN YEH'S FACE, REFUSING EVEN TO SPEAK TO HER, SUPPOSEDLY DUE TO DISPLEASURE THAT A DPP OUTSIDER HAD BEEN BROUGHT IN, WITHOUT ANY CONSULTATION WITH THE CITY COUNCIL, AT A DELICATE TIME TO DEAL WITH, AND LIKELY DOWNPLAY, ISSUES OF CORRUPTION. ALTHOUGH SEVERAL FORMER CHEN CHI-MAI APPOINTEES HAD TENDERED THEIR RESIGNATIONS, GUAN TOLD AIT THAT YEH HAD ASKED VICE MAYOR CHENG WEN-LUNG TO STAY ON. CHENG HAD WORKED PREVIOUSLY WITH YEH WHEN SHE SERVED AS MINISTER OF TRANSPORTATION AND COMMUNICATIONS.

3. (C) GUAN BI-LING NOTED THAT, ALTHOUGH YEH IS NOT EXPECTED TO RUN FOR KAOHSIUNG MAYOR IN 2006, WITH A FULL YEAR BEFORE THE ELECTION, THERE IS NO TELLING WHAT MAY HAPPEN. GUAN PRAISED HER OWN PARTY'S "MATURE SYSTEM" THAT DECIDES UPON NOMINEES, BUT SAID THAT A PRIMARY MAY BE NEEDED IF A COMPROMISE CANNOT BE REACHED. WITH CHEN CHI-MAI'S RESIGNATION, GUAN BELIEVES ALL POSSIBLE CANDIDATES, INCLUDING CHEN CHI-MAI, CHEN CHU, AND YEH CHU-LAN ARE NOW ON A LEVEL PLAYING FIELD. HOWEVER, SHE BELIEVES THE THAI LABOR RIOT HURT CHEN CHI-MAI TO THE DEGREE THAT CHEN CHU IS NOW IN A MORE FAVORABLE POSITION THAN THE PREVIOUS ACTING MAYOR TO SECURE THE MAYORAL NOMINATION.

4. (C) WHEN ASKED IF SHE HERSELF WOULD RUN FOR MAYOR, GUAN NOTED THAT SHE IS CLOSELY ASSOCIATED WITH PREMIER HSIEH CHANG-TING. IF SHE WERE TO RUN FOR MAYOR, IT WOULD CAUSE DISSATISFACTION AMONG PAN-GREEN FACTIONS AND POSSIBLY AFFECT HSIEH AS HE SEEKS SUPPORT FOR THE 2008 PRESIDENTIAL BID. GUAN, A FORMER ACADEMIC JUST NEWLY ELECTED TO THE LY IN 2004, SEES HERSELF AS WOEFULLY SHY OF THE GRASSROOTS SUPPORT NEEDED TO RUN A SUCCESSFUL CAMPAIGN FOR KAOHSIUNG MAYOR. ALSO, SHE BELIEVES THAT THE THAI LABOR RIOTS SIGNIFICANTLY AFFECTED GRASSROOTS SUPPORT FOR HSIEH. SINCE THE DPP DID NOT COME TOGETHER TO DEFEND ITSELF OR ITS ADMINISTRATION, SUSPICIONS OF CORRUPTION KEPT GROWING. SHE BELIEVES THAT IF DPP CHAIRMAN SU TSENG-CHANG AND OTHER DPP HEAVYWEIGHTS HAD DEFENDED HSIEH IN PUBLIC THE POLITICAL WAVES WOULDN'T HAVE EXTENDED SO FAR OR CAUSED SO MUCH DAMAGE. IN FACT, SHE SAYS THAT ALTHOUGH SHE KNOWS HSIEH WILL BE COMPLETELY EXONERATED FROM ANY WRONG DOING, SHE STILL IS CONCERNED ABOUT THE POLITICAL IMPACT OF A DRAWN OUT INVESTIGATION.

5. (C) IN A MEETING THE SAME DAY, KMT LY MEMBER LEE FU-SHING REFUSED TO EXPRESS ANY OPINION ABOUT YEH'S APPOINTMENT, SAYING THAT IT WAS A DPP MATTER. LEE HAS LITTLE CONFIDENCE THAT THE INVESTIGATION INTO THE THAI LABOR RIOTS WILL GO DEEPLY INTO THE CORRUPTION THAT HE SAID UNDOUBTEDLY EXISTS. HOWEVER, LEE ADMITTED THAT THE POLITICAL FALL OUT FROM THE RIOTS (SEE REFTTEL) WILL AFFECT DPP'S SUPPORT IN THE SOUTH. LEE BELIEVES THAT DPP CHAIRMAN SU TSENG-CHANG IS PURPOSEFULLY SILENT ON THE MATTER AND IS PLEASED THE KMT IS VIGOROUSLY ATTACKING HSIEH CHANG-TING, WHO WAS THE MAYOR OF KAOHSIUNG AND HAD BEEN IN CHARGE OF THE RAPID TRANSIT PROJECT DURING HIS TENURE.

6. (C) ALTHOUGH LEE WOULD NOT SPECULATE ON THE NEXT KMT MAYORAL CANDIDATE, HE EXPRESSED HIS OWN INTEREST IN RUNNING FOR THE OFFICE. HE NOTED THAT HE PAID SPECIAL ATTENTION TO THE URBAN PLANNING ASPECT OF HIS 1995 INTERNATIONAL VISITOR

TRIP TO THE U.S. AND HAS BEEN THINKING FOR YEARS ABOUT THE BEST WAY TO DEVELOP KAOHSIUNG CITY. WITH THE RECENT SHAKE-UP AT CITY HALL, LEE IS WATCHING THE SITUATION UNTIL EARLY NEXT YEAR WHEN HE WILL DECIDE WHETHER OR NOT TO SEEK THE KMT NOMINATION FOR MAYOR. AS A STRONG MA YING-JEOU SUPPORTER (AND, ACCORDING TO LEE, THE ONLY OPEN SUPPORTER AMONG THE KMT'S 83 SOUTHERN LEGISLATORS), LEE STRONGLY BELIEVES THE PEOPLE IN KAOHSIUNG ARE LOOKING FOR REFORM AND ARE HOPING MA WILL LEAD TAIWAN TO A BETTER FUTURE. HE SAID THAT HE HIMSELF AND OTHER NATIVE (BEN-TU) PEOPLE OF TAIWAN WILL STAND WITH MA IN THE NEXT PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION. HE ANTICIPATES MA WILL PICK A "BEN-TU" RUNNING MATE, SUCH AS WU DEN-YIH, KMT LY MEMBER FROM NAN-TOU COUNTY AND FORMER KAOHSIUNG MAYOR, TO HELP SOLVE MA'S PROBLEM OF BEING A "WAI-SHENG" PERSON.

17. (C) THE DPP KAOHSIUNG COUNTY MAGISTRATE YANG CHIU-HSING ADMITTED COMPLETE SURPRISE THAT YEH CHU-LAN WAS SELECTED TO REPLACE FORMER ACTING MAYOR CHEN CHI-MAI. HOWEVER, YANG PRAISED YEH AS A GOOD AND COMPETENT PERSON WHOSE PRESTIGE FROM FORMER APPOINTMENTS WOULD SERVE HER WELL IN THE SOUTH. YANG SERIOUSLY DOUBTS THAT YEH WILL RUN FOR MAYOR AS HE ANTICIPATES SHE IS A MORE LIKELY CONTENDER FOR THE DPP VICE-PRESIDENTIAL RACE. THE MAGISTRATE ALSO SEES LITTLE LIKELIHOOD OF CHEN CHI-MAI RUNNING FOR MAYOR IN THE 2006 RACE. YANG THINKS TOO MANY QUESTIONS WOULD ARISE AS TO WHY CHEN STEPPED DOWN IF HIS INTENTION WAS JUST TO RUN AGAIN. ALSO, LOGISTICALLY, YANG NOTED THAT CHEN CHI-MAI WOULD HAVE TO THROW HIS HAT IN THE RACE NO LATER THAN APRIL 2006 AND THAT TRYING TO BUILD SUPPORT IN SUCH A SHORT TIME, AND ESPECIALLY AFTER JUST RESIGNING, MIGHT BE PROBLEMS TOO HARD TO OVERCOME.

18. (C) COMMENT: YEH CHU-LAN HAS YET TO BE INSTALLED OFFICIALLY AS KAOHSIUNG'S MAYOR, ALTHOUGH THERE IS NO DOUBT THAT ALL THAT STANDS BETWEEN HER AND OFFICIAL MEETINGS BEGINING MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 26, IS MERELY A MATTER OF FORMALITIES. AIT/K WILL CONTINUE TO FOLLOW DEVELOPMENTS AS THE NEW ACTING MAYOR BEGINS HER TERM OF OFFICE FACING LOCAL POLITICIANS WHO HAVE NOT PROVED ON THE WHOLE TO BE A WELCOMING GROUP AND AS THE CORRUPTION ISSUE CONTINUES TO LOOM LARGE IN BOTH THE PAN-BLUE AND PAN-GREEN CAMPS FOLLOWING THE THAI LABOR RIOTS. END COMMENT.

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